

VZCZCXRO1378
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHMB #0019 0151059
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 151059Z JAN 10 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY MBABANE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3853
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS MBABANE 000019

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S FOR MAYA HARRIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [WZ](#)

SUBJECT: SWAZI HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER: SUPPORT FOR THE MONARCHY HIGH
DESPITE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND POOR GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

¶1. (SBU) Mandla Mkhwanazi, chair of the newly recreated Swazi Lawyers for Human Rights, told PolOff on January 15 that support for King Mswati III and the political system remained high in the country, despite crushing levels of poverty, unemployment, corruption, violations of human rights, and high HIV/AIDS infection rates. Speaking as a political observer and not as a member of the opposition, Mkhwanazi indicated that political opposition groups have declined in power and organization since the inception of the 2006 constitution and do not pose a threat to the monarchy. He stated that if political change were to happen, it would likely emerge from internal royal family disputes or result from an economic collapse.

¶2. (SBU) In discussing the revitalization of the human rights lawyers' group, which currently has forty members and had been defunct prior to 2009, Mkhwanazi mentioned it hopes to pattern its activities on the Zimbabwe human rights lawyers' organization, and work with the nascent Swazi government Human Rights Commission (HRC) to prosecute cases. The Swazi Lawyers for Human Rights had not yet met with HRC commissioners, because the HRC is currently waiting for enabling legislation to permit it to take on cases. He indicated he has his reservations about whether the government-controlled HRC will be sufficiently independent to take on human rights violators, which he said are committed generally by members of the government and chiefdom leaders.

¶3. (SBU) Mkhwanazi emphasized that the royal family and chiefs have been largely successful in demonizing the human rights issue as un-Swazi and anti-monarchy in the popular perception. In addition to publishing press statements on human rights violations, his organization is looking at holding educational seminars to change this perception. The challenge, said Mandla, is finding target groups as well as a way to introduce the topic in an acceptable manner.

¶4. (SU) COMMENT: Opposition to the current system of government does exist in Swaziland, particularly within the labor movement, banned political parties such as the People's United Democratic Movement or PUDEMO, and in the Manzini, Matsapha, and Mbabae urban centers. Mkhwanazi's statements regarding the popularity of the King and the governing system track with Post's sense that active resistance to the regime lacks popular support and remains fragmented. For this reason, civil society groups generally oppose a referendum on the current system, and focus efforts on finding ways to educate a largely rural populace on their rights. END COMMENT.

IRVING